



MELONS

Health Benefits

◆ Melons are a rich source of carotenoids and a good to excellent source of vitamin A and vitamin C.

◆ Carotenoids are yellow, orange, and red pigments synthesized by plants that protect the body from free radicals and may help protect the body from some diseases.

◆ One cup cubed cantaloupe, honeydew, or watermelon counts as one cup fruit.

Fun Facts

◆ By weight, the watermelon is the most common melon consumed in America, followed by the cantaloupe and honeydew.

◆ According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest watermelon weighed 262 pounds.

Home Grown History

Cantaloupe—The words cantaloupe and muskmelon are frequently used interchangeably. However, muskmelon is a family of melon that includes the cantaloupe, honeydew, and casaba melon. Cantaloupe has been growing since ancient times in the Nile River Valley in Egypt but likely originated near present-day Iran. Cantaloupe was introduced to Europe in the 15th century and became a popular fruit due to its sweetness. There are two varieties of muskmelon that is called *cantaloupe*: the U.S. cantaloupe and the European cantaloupe. The U.S. cantaloupe is the most popular type of muskmelon of North America. Today, the majority of crops are produced in California, Arizona, and Texas. They are available throughout the year but the harvesting season peaks in the summer.



Watermelon—The history of watermelon is not well known but it is believed to have originated in Africa. David Livingston, a Scottish missionary and explorer, noted a high abundance of watermelon growing near the Kalahari Desert when on his travels in Africa in 1857. The Moors likely introduced watermelon to Europe in the 13th century during their rule of the Iberian Peninsula which includes Spain and Portugal. The Spanish then brought watermelon to the Americas in the 16th century. American Indians are believed to have started cultivating the fruit shortly after that. European colonists also brought seeds with them as they settled in the Americas. By 1629, they were widely grown in Massachusetts. Watermelon popularity in the U.S. is likely due, in large part, to African slaves. The slave trade was a major vehicle in transporting watermelon to the country. Enslaved field hands would plant watermelon in the cotton fields to enjoy during the hot summer months, while they worked.



Student Activities

- ◆ Have students investigate and compare the nutrition content of melons varieties. Ask them to investigate what carotenoids are and what role they play in the body.
- ◆ Have students make a schedule of farmer's markets in the area. If none, have students research how to get one in your area. Have students develop a promotional campaign, inviting students, families, and friends to the market.
- ◆ Arrange for the class to work in small groups (3-5 students). Each group creates a recipe for a nutritious snack that uses melons. Have the group members write a recipe for their snack. The groups can volunteer to bring in their snacks for the class to enjoy.

Growing Melons in Wisconsin

Melons are a warm-weather annual plant that are sensitive to cold temperatures at any stage of growth. It is important to choose a site with well-drained soils that warm quickly. Poorly drained soils stay cool longer, which increases the incidence of root disease. Melons grow on trailing vines and grow best when spaced every 12 inches, in rows spaced four to six feet apart.

Melons require a long growing season of 90-125 days with temperatures averaging between 70-80 degrees for optimal growth. Muskmelons and watermelons can be planted 3-4 weeks before the last spring killing frost date. Melon seedlings can be started in a greenhouse. The seedlings can be transplanted at the end of May and usually early June for the northern part of the state

Due to their large size, melons are normally hand-harvested when ripe. Muskmelons can be harvested when they reach the stage referred to as "half-slip" or "full-slip." At this stage, the fruit readily separates (slips), with slight pressure, from the stem. It is difficult to know when to harvest watermelons. One method is to observe the part of the fruit that touches the soil, called the ground spot. When the ground spot changes from white to creamy yellow, the melon is ripe and ready to harvest.

Beyond the Classroom

Ask students to note during their next trip to the grocery store the variety of sizes and shapes that the same type of melon come in. Ask students to record all melon varieties observed at the store and investigate the history of any new melon varieties observed.

For More Information:

University of Wisconsin Extension:
<http://rusk.uwex.edu/files/2013/01/Growing-pumpkins-and-vine-crops-in-WI-A3688.pdf>

University of Illinois Extension:
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dmp/palette/070729.html>

Classroom Cooking—*Marvelous Melons*

Makes 36 taste test servings (¼ cup)

Ingredients:

- 1 pound cantaloupe
- 1 pound honeydew
- 1 pound watermelon
- 1 tsp chili seasoning or powder
- 6 tablespoons lime juice
- Paper cups/plates

Directions:

1. Wash, peel, and cube melons.
2. Combine melons in a large bowl.
3. Sprinkle chili seasoning and lime juice over melons and gently toss until well mixed and serve.

Recipe accessed at <http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/>



Exploring Wisconsin Melons — Taste Test Activity

What You Will Need:

- 1 cup each of cubed cantaloupe, watermelon, and honeydew per group of 6-8 students.
- *Home Grown: Tastes of WI* resource guide
- Taste test survey, paper and pencils

Activity:

- Have students observe, touch, smell, and taste each sample and make notes describing the different tastes. Extend the activity in class by comparing and contrasting the varieties and making a graph showing the likes and dislikes of the class.

